

Intern program will help redesign, rebuild Iraq infrastructure

BAGHDAD—A lack of trained professionals has left Iraq struggling to rebuild its crumbling infrastructure since the fall of the decades old oppressive Saddam regime, but an agreement between the Iraq Ministry of Water Resources and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to implement an intern and study program is designed to help resolve the problem.

For the past three decades Iraq's infrastructure has been ignored. Under the agreement, the two agencies selected a group Iraqi engineers for an intern program and to attend the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education in Delft, the Netherlands for advanced studies in hydraulic, sanitary and environmental engineering. The group arrived in the Netherlands Oct. 15.

The Development Fund for Iraq provided the Corps of Engineers \$1.5 million to defray the cost of the intern program. However, the funds must be used exclusively to fund tuition, travel, per diem, supplies and other costs in direct support of the Iraqi students. Funding may not be used to pay for salaries of the interns or administrative costs.

Generally, any member of the Ministry of Water Resources staff may apply for the program provided he meets the technical requirements established by the Corps of Engineers, however, a person's degree of motivation and a desire to improve skills are influential criteria for selection, said Margaret Jones, who oversees the Corps portion of the program. Despite the difficulties and personal dangers in the war-torn country, 16 engineers submitted all the required information and were academically admitted to the institute.

The interns consist of civil, irrigation, environmental and agricultural engineers. At the institute, they will specialize in hydraulic engineering and river basin development, environmental planning and management, environmental science and technology, water resources management, surface water hydrology, water supply engineering and water quality management.

"The 18-month master's degree program's goal is to build a knowledge base in water resources management for Iraq in the fields of flood control, infrastructure development, environmental engineering, consensus building, water policy and educational methods and systems," said Jones.

"Providing for the nation's water needs must be a priority," Jones said. "In meeting this goal, the nation does not just build and maintain its infrastructure, it provides real jobs, with real wages, and builds the country's quality of life."

Investment in Iraq's infrastructure benefits the entire economy, therefore helping stabilize the country and promoting a free Iraq. For example, every major

construction project creates hundreds of jobs for the local populace. Overall, the construction industry has provided thousands of jobs for the country. Investment in infrastructure rebuilding means Iraqis can go back to work repairing the electrical grid and water distribution system and giving Iraqis hope for a secure future.

The internship will provide not only the opportunity for advanced schooling, but will give the interns a chance for on the job training with experienced counterparts within the Corps of Engineers.